

## Article

# Worn clothes and textiles as archives of memory

Hunt, Carole

Available at <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/23431/>

*Hunt, Carole ORCID: 0000-0002-2702-6003 (2014) Worn clothes and textiles as archives of memory. Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty, 5 (2). pp. 207-232. ISSN 2040-4417*

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/csfb.5.2.207\\_1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/csfb.5.2.207_1)

For more information about UCLan's research in this area go to  
<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/researchgroups/> and search for <name of research Group>.

For information about Research generally at UCLan please go to  
<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/>

All outputs in CLoK are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including Copyright law. Copyright, IPR and Moral Rights for the works on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [policies](#) page.

## **Re-Tracing the Archive - Materialising Memory**

### **Abstract**

*The subject of this article is memory, specifically, the capacity of textiles to retain and communicate memory, both privately and publicly. I argue that cloth can be regarded as a form of archival information and as a carrier of knowledge. My questions centre on the value of textiles in our lives and on the role of textiles in the process of recollection, as well as the extent to which textiles can stimulate remembering, not through the strategic mnemonics of national monuments and events, or the mnemonic device of the souvenir, but rather through unplanned encounters with textiles in their various guises and in different contexts. Each attempt at recollection may reveal historical, cultural and personal data. The themes of 'archiving' memory and 'materialising' memory are explored through an analysis of works of artists who use textile media in their visual practice and writers who include their memories of textiles in their works. I use 'Miniature' and 'Gigantic' as a critical tool to distinguish between 2 areas of analysis: the private and public within an interdisciplinary approach, combining the study of memory with philosophy, literature, history, material culture and visual studies.*

**Key Words:** textiles, stuff, memory, recollection, preservation, archiving, materialising, private, public. Miniature, Gigantic

## Re-Tracing the Archive - Materialising Memory

### Introduction: Material Matters

In *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings* Virginia Woolf's describes one of her 'earliest memories' of her mother. She writes:

I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background – my mother's dress; and she was sitting in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose. Perhaps we were going to St Ives; more probably, for from the light it must have been evening, we were coming back to London. (2002, p. 85)

Woolf's 'material memory' illustrates how textiles can furnish our picture of the past, and are prominent among what Ricoeur (2004, p. 99) describes as the vast treasures of memory. Stallybrass (1999) and Millar (2012) have remarked on cloth's capacity to receive the human imprint, marked by its everyday use, impregnated with the sweat and stains of everyday life. Textiles form an archive of our intimate existence. From Winnicott's (2005, p. 5) baby's blanket, the transitional object that serves as the exemplary metaphor of subject individuation<sup>1</sup>, to what Young (1994, p. 197) describes as the 'frontier between the self and the social', dress plays a role in simultaneously revealing and concealing our identities, performing a fundamental role in negotiating the changing relationship between our inner selves and the outside world.<sup>1</sup> Such personal and cultural significance ascribes textiles with what Assmann (2006, p.129) has called a 'mnemonic energy'. This notion of textiles providing a vivid connection with the past is the basis for my analysis in this article.

This article examines how the mnemonic energy and properties of textiles, in particular their capacity to 'hold' memory, contribute to the preservation and re-presentation of private and public memory. Writing in connection with the V&A (2010) Quilting and Patchwork exhibition, Germaine Greer noted that museum quilts, unlike genuine tribal ones sacrifice authenticity for art value. She writes:

---

<sup>1</sup> WINNICOTT, W. 2005. Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena. *In: Playing and Reality*. London and New York: Routledge, pp.1 – 34. Discussing childhood development Winnicott introduces the concept of transitional objects considered to be "vitally important" by the infant often including something soft, such as "the corner of a blanket or eiderdown". With reference to a particular developmental sequence; it serves as the intermediate developmental phase between the psychic and external reality. The parents get to know the objects' value and allow it to remain unwashed, in the knowledge that any changes may destroy its meaning to the infant.

My treasured textiles are not art. Tracey Emin's quilts are. They exist to be exhibited, not used.

Greer's comment adds another dimension. They highlight the gap between our experiences and love of 'real life textiles' and the more academic critical discourse of them.

My article addresses both.

It is divided into two parts.

Part A is a theoretical overview comprised of three sections. Section 1 aims to demonstrate that textiles are a distinctive area of artistic and cultural practice, and that deconstruction and poststructuralist theory are important elements in the critical discourse on textiles. This section also examines a generic term 'textile stuff' that allows textiles to be interpreted through a dual perspective, referencing the work of psychoanalyst and writer Adam Phillips.

Section 2 presents a social framework for understanding individual and collective memory. It develops a schema that combines traditional memory discourse with literary contributions in order to reflect direct experiences with textiles.

Section 3 proposes an innovative conceptual framework to distinguish the public and private, using English language and metaphor.

Part B is presents an application of the theoretical approaches and frameworks developed in Part A, using examples based on the notion of the public and the private. Part B is also divided into three sections. Section 1 considers Derrida's term 'archivisation' in relation to how memory may be inscribed within, as well as on, textiles. Section 2 explores this concept through representations of social and cultural memory in creative practice. Examples from historical and cultural studies, as well as psychoanalysis, inform the discussion. Section 3 examines how textiles in everyday spaces can embody individual experience. Using examples drawn from phenomenology and literature, this section discusses how insights drawn from memoirs may have implications for critical discourse about textiles and memory.

## **A. Theoretical Overview**

### **A1. Reading Material**

The aim of this section is to highlight and expand on existing theoretical discourse on textiles; the work of Maharaj (1992), Stallybrass (1996), Pajaczkowska (2005) and Jeffries (2007) amongst others. The section presents a generic terminology, which provides a dual perspective of

textiles, by considering them both as cloth/material in their raw state, and as a functional objects connected to the daily routines of everyday life.

Both the critical and creative contexts of this study are situated in the recently developed 'expanded' field of textiles research and criticisms. This multi-faceted view of textiles is represented in the journal *Textile: the Journal of Cloth and Culture*, which situates interdisciplinary research on textiles within the broader context of material and visual culture. The term 'expanded field' is adopted from Krauss's well known essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979). Krauss's essay, as Huyssen (2003, p. 96) has argued, was 'an ambitious attempt to create a theoretical map for some of the most challenging sculptural practices of the 1960's and early 1970's'. Krauss (1986, p. 277) wrote that the categories of sculpture and painting had been stretched in an extraordinary display of elasticity to include just about anything. To follow Krauss (1986) there are artists whose work might be understood as framing their interest in textiles as 'not textile' and 'not sewing'. Thus, the concept of an 'expanded field' for textiles has enabled the disparate sources of theory and practice, to be addressed under an umbrella term which represents a dynamic and wide ranging set of critical practices.

Intellectual engagement with deconstruction and poststructuralist theory has been an important element in the critical discourse on textiles. Much of this work has centered on developing a theoretical framework for artistic practice involving textiles which is not defined by medium and technique. For example, Maharaj (1992; 2001) has problematised hybrid work which spans textiles and fine art, around Derrida's concept of 'undecidable' as a means of challenging authorship, originality and historically imposed disciplinary boundaries on creative practice.<sup>2</sup> Further clarification of these arguments can be sought in the writings of Kristeva (1984), Pollock (2006), and Chandler (2007). Harris (1999) and Jeffries (2007) (among others) offer critical insight into the use of cloth in contemporary art. The crux of these arguments is the creation of a multidimensional space for a variety of influences and voices, rather than just one. Thus a straightforward and singular reading of the meaning behind work (practical and written) is simply not possible. However, while the absence of a distinctive medium (or obvious textile skills) may challenge the limits of a singular term with

---

<sup>2</sup> MAHARAJ, S. 'Textile Art – Who Are You?. In: J. JEFFRIES, ed. *Reinventing Textiles, Vol.2 Gender and Identity*. Bristol: Telos, pp. 7-10. Maharaj's 1992 essay, Textile Art – Who Are You? Towards Intercultural Studies in Textiles. *Journal of Design History*. 26 (4), p.79, is translated into 'Textile Art Am I You?' In the new version Maharaj restages questions around textiles and their double and oppositional meanings to pose questions on cultural identity, and to narrate stories of enforced nomadic displacement. His methods reveal the less romantic side of recycling fabrics; sweated labour.

which to identify and define a visual practice, a lack of either challenges the notion of the word itself as self defining (Phillips, 2010, p. 15).<sup>3</sup>

Following Phillips (2010), we can look up the word 'textile' and come away with a fairly clear impression of what a textile ought to be: 'textile, n. 1 a type of cloth or woven fabric. [...] adj. relating to fabric or weaving. ORIGIN C17th: from L. *textilis*, from *text-*, *texere*, to weave'. But, equally the definition of 'textile' opens the door to an array of other associations which have much to do with textiles: cloth, clothes, blankets, needles, pins, thread, yarn and so on. Intriguingly, the generic term 'stuff', as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, provides a surprising connection with textile matter: 'Stuff, n. 1 suede is tough stuff: MATERIAL, fabric cloth, textile; matter, substance. 2 ITEMS, articles, object, goods; informal things, bits and pieces, odds and ends. 3 all my stuff is in the suitcase: BELONGINGS, (personal) possessions, effect, good (and chattels), paraphernalia'. And as Pajackowska (2005, p. 21) has observed, the word 'stuff' is in fact a translation of the French *étoffe*, meaning cloth or material. The term 'textile stuff' gives generic meaning to textiles as unspecified; neither material nor object, yet recognised as fitting within Heidegger's generic 'thingness'.<sup>4</sup>

*Fig. 1, Verdi Yahooda, The Domestic Interior, 1993*

*Photograph: black and white, silver gelatine print (courtesy of the artist)*

The pared down elegance of Verdi Yahooda's *The Domestic Interior* (Fig. 1) has all the elements of a formal painting, the composition of the artist's precise arrangement and the choice of objects which has the hallmarks of a 'still life'. Its black and white format invites inevitable comparisons and associations to be made with the nostalgic appeal of old prints. The photograph is extraordinarily atmospheric; its dense grainy texture reveals the metallic chemistry of the process. Critiqued within the context of a different discipline (e.g. photography), Yahooda's work may well be subject to different methods of evaluation. And the intention is not to argue that artworks encompassing textile media should be categorised as a textile art. However, to engage Yahooda's image in textile discourse is to focus in on the material and 'stuff'. The grainy effects and limited palette of Yahooda's image allude to another time and place. Yet, it is equally the authentic

---

<sup>3</sup> PHILLIPS, A. 2010. Look it Up. In: A. PHILLIPS and J. CLARK, eds. *The Concise History of Dress*. London: Violette Editions, pp. 7-19. Phillips explores the relationship between words for clothes and clothes for words to redefine clothing in terms of anxiety, wish and desire. He describes dictionaries as "an insurance policy against possible misunderstanding in that they reassure us that clarity and comprehension are available (p. 11). However, Phillips also questions the limits imposed by them.

<sup>4</sup> HEIDEGGER, M. 2001. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Perennial Classics. I use the term 'thingness' with reference to Heidegger's discussion of the jug (or vessel) explored in 'The Thing' (pp. 161 – 184). Focusing on the jug, Heidegger (pp. 164 – 165) asks, "What is a thing" "What in the thing is thingly? What is the thing itself?"

textile 'stuff'; the sewing accoutrements of the domestic tailor (or dressmaker) that do the talking. Among the textile related visual clues, snippets of words peep out to evoke more personal associations. The identity of the subject is called into question. For example, who did all this 'stuff' belong to and what is its significance to the present? In the footsteps of Derrida (2008) and Phillips (2010) there are other signifiers of textiles than the cloth itself. Analysis within the broader context of visual culture implies a shift of the methodological focus away from the physical properties of the visual image. Instead the focus is on the representational content of the image and its meaning, its interpretation within and outside the corpus of textile theory, yet always with cloth as material or 'stuff', as signified and signifier.

Engagement with deconstruction and poststructuralist theory has yielded more depth and complexity in our understanding of textile media in visual culture. However, Howes (2003, p. xi) and Attfield (2000) have argued that material culture offers an understanding of how people make sense of the world through physical objects. This suggests that material culture could provide a useful frame of reference for those parts of a visual practice that engage with notions of objecthood and utility.

Thus, an examination of the role of textiles in memory is dependent on recognising its subject through creative practices of both reading and interpretation. Whether as material or object, the term 'textile stuff' secures the signified in all its different guises and manifestations within the generic framework of textiles. However, in the discussions that follow, rather than applying an hermeneutic theory, or an art historical analysis to separate readings of textiles – as material or 'stuff' – both readings will be incorporated. This duality of approach to the subject builds on what Pajaczkowska (2005, p. 225) has described as the complex and multi-disciplinary significance of textiles in culture. Expanding on the insights of Phillips is an attempt to generate, through language, the embodiment of experience which relates directly to the object itself. Opening up new possibilities has been an important critical tool in the discussion of textiles within an 'expanded field', and within a wider culture, one which has helped mark out its approach as different from other disciplines. Phillips' insights on language which have opened up more literary possibilities around perceptions of textiles as both material and object 'textile stuff' - will form a part of this process throughout.

## **A2. Framing the Subject within Memory Discourse**

The previous section has mapped out the creative context and the theoretical approaches to the subject within visual culture. The following section turns to the discourses on memory to explore critical engagement, and how best to represent private and public memory in and through 'textile stuff'.

Virginia Woolf's earliest memory of her mother through her dress provided the initial thoughts for this enquiry. However vivid and moving they are, Woolf's reminiscences and memoirs are well known for their 'unexpected' detail, emphasizing involuntary and arbitrary actions over chronological development. The result is that there is no definitive theory of memory that can be applied to her work. To follow Krauss (1986, p. 293), it is a given that the context of any critique should be grounded in theoretically based knowledge, and derived from established discourses. However, both Winter (2001) and Huyssen (2003) have commented on an incredible and bewildering array of inquiries into memory – traumatic memory, collective memory, national memory, testimonial memory and so on.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, argues Huyssen (2003, pp. 2-3), the terms 'social', 'collective' or 'public' memory are often contrasted with 'private', 'individual' or 'personal' memory. Huyssen's comments present a dichotomy. To meet the objectives of the study, what is needed is a framework which would incorporate both private and public memory. Within this private and public dynamic, emphasis is needs to be placed on what Weissberg (1999, p. 12) describes as 'individually owned memory' and on memory which is representative of the experiences of larger groups and communities, what Halbwachs (1992) and Ricoeur (2004) term 'collective memory'.<sup>6</sup>

Bal (1999, p. vii) argues that the term 'cultural memory' means that memory can be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual or social one. Similarly, Boym (2001, p. 53) suggests that the frameworks of cultural memory could offer signposts 'for individual reminiscences and multiple narratives'.<sup>7</sup> Boym (ibid, pp. 53-55) asserts that collective memory should be understood as the common landmarks of everyday life that constitute shared social frameworks of individual recollection. They enable shared assumptions which provide the daily glue of intelligibility, seemingly independent from historical and political contexts. In the most 'abstract sense' these are the places where we work

---

<sup>5</sup> HUYSSSEN, A. 2003. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Huyssen (pp. 1 -7) argues that an explosion of memory discourses at the end of the twentieth century has added significantly to our understanding of history and deal with the temporal dimensions of everyday life. At the same time, argues Huyssen, we need to acknowledge that the value of history is contested today in ways which differ from Nietzsche's critique of the archive and the monumental.

<sup>6</sup> AMOS, B. D. and L. WEISSBERG. 1999. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Michigan: Wayne State University Press. Weissberg (p. 12) argues that memory's own history, in regard to our understanding of what it is and how it functions, has been radically changed.

<sup>7</sup> HALBWACHS, M. Op, Cit, p. 38. Halbwachs argued that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that is capable of the act of recollection.



and the places where we live.<sup>8</sup> Attention to the smaller 'landmarks' of everyday life eschews epic and grand narratives in favour of personal and local knowledge, that which Samuel (1996, p. 195) describes as a 'poetics of the ordinary'.

Bal (ibid) views "cultural memorization" as an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed. For Bal it is the interaction between the past and the present which is the stuff of cultural memory. The artworks I discuss are more likely to be seen in an art gallery or shown at specific sites that have been chosen to create additional meaning and understanding. One purpose of this type of work is to intervene in the public sphere and offer, if only temporarily, the possibility of representing a community's history, where there is sometimes an absence of history. This is in contrast to the formal acknowledgement, referred to by Saltzman (2006) and discussed by Huyssen (2003) of the historical monument as memorial. These designated sites form part of a much larger artistic enterprise, dedicated to questions of historical inheritance, and more recently, argues Saltzman (2006, p. 9), historical trauma. That is not to say that cloth is not suited to issues more usually associated with the monumental. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag* (1971-1995) is a magnificent example of how cloth can be mobilised to quite literally 'wrap' up history and memory. However, while cultural memory is characterised by its proximity to the everyday, Assmann (ibid, p. 129) argues that the very temporality of 'everydayness' is in fact delimiting. Cultural memory has to have a fixed point, dates on the calendar of events past. This suggests that constructed remembering is incompatible with the subjective and unpredictable element of memory posited (Huyssen, 1995, p. 13) and evident in the memoirs of Woolf (2002, p. 84) the writings of Barthes (2000, p. 70), and Benjamin's 'flashes' (1999, p.247).<sup>9 10 11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 140. Winnicott wrote, "I wish to examine the place, using the word in an abstract sense, where we most of the time are when we are experiencing life. By the language we use we show our natural interest in this matter."

<sup>9</sup> WOOLF, V. 2002. *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings* London: Pimlico. Woolf (pp. 81- 82) describes two exceptional 'moments' of remembrance as ending in total despair and physical collapse. Woolf claimed that sudden violent "blows" and "shocks" functioned as "revelations" and her capacity to receive these is what made her a writer.

<sup>10</sup> BARTHES, R. 2000. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Vintage. I am making reference here to Barthes (pp. 67-72) description of the moment he came across a photograph of his mother aged five years old. For Barthes, the photograph revealed her completely, her kindness, tenderness and "innocence". Barthes's realisation prompted an act of joyous remembrance comparable to Proust's 'involuntary memory', a comparison of which Barthes was clearly aware of.

<sup>11</sup> BENJAMIN, W. 1999. *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico. In the essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (p. 247) Benjamin argued that "the true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again".

For Huyssen (1995), the mode of memory is a process of searching (*recherché*) rather than one of recuperation. Such process allows for the subjectivity of memory, of moments and discontinuities rather than sifting through chronologies of events. The '*recherché*' element of Huyssen's commentary is Proustian. For Proust, memory is an unpredictable adventure, where time can be apprehended in the most unexpected ways, the most spectacular being a sudden resurrection of the past.<sup>12</sup> And similarly, the virtual reality of consciousness, as defined by Bergson, eludes logic, science and comprehension. According to Bergson (1991, p. 154), given the right circumstances, our pasts could cross the threshold of consciousness.<sup>13</sup> As Huyssen (1995, p. 13) has argued, 'it is this tenuous fissure between past and present that constitutes memory, making it powerfully alive and distinct from the Archive or any other mere system of storage and retrieval'.

What I am proposing is a combined schema for memory within which the subject can be examined. Following Bal (1999) and Huyssen (2003), memory can be understood as a cultural, individual or social phenomenon. Further, following the footsteps of Boym, cultural memory allows us to conceive of a framework for memory which has a social orientation rather than an official one. Insights gained from the memorable literary fugues of Woolf, Proust and Benjamin underlie attempts to generate the more adventurous embodiment of experience. Within this framework, voluntary and involuntary memories of the individual intertwine with collective memories. In the following sections it is the 'textile stuff' which is the centre of attention. However, the principles and theories of memory discourse guide and underpin more creative approaches to the subject.

### **A3. a Private and Public Dynamic - the 'Miniature' and the 'Gigantic**

---

<sup>12</sup> PROUST, M. 1966. *Remembrance of Things Past*. 17th edition, London: Chatto and Windus. Proust (pp. 58-59) describes a particular event that provoked within him an 'unremembered state', a memory of an experience that is some how connected to a madeleine cake dipped in a lime-blossom tisane of tea. Overwhelmed by the effect of sensations stirred within him, Proust is conscious of the tea and cake's ceremonial and transcendental properties. However, he is initially unable to locate the original existence of this exquisite feeling. He goes on to repeat the tea drinking ceremony in a quest to not only repeat what had been intoxicating and pleasurable, but also to define the remembered experience.

<sup>13</sup> BERGSON, H. 1991. *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone Books. Bergson (pp. 133 – 177) illustrates this through his well known image of the memory cone, twice in the third chapter of *Matter and Memory*. The cone image symbolises a dynamic process where memories are descending down the cone from the past to the present perception. This progressive movement of memory as a whole takes place, according to Bergson, between the extremes of the immobile base of "pure memory", which Bergson calls "contemplation" and the plane where action takes place. Conscious thinking then, occurs when pure memory moves down into singular images. This may be better understood as conscious recollection (of the *durée*, the stream of life) through contemplation.

Section 2 has provided an interactive framework for memory whereby individual recollection is able to interweave with collective memory. The aim of Section 3 is to establish a framework which eloquently expresses and distinguishes between private and public contexts.

Following Boym (2001), the framework is devised by reflecting on private and public spaces which have a social orientation, and thinking about how these spaces might be distinguished from each other. In this examination of the subject, readers will eventually find themselves in the public Archive, museum and art gallery. But they will also find themselves in the private space of the home, in cupboards and drawers, and even in the pages of a book. Whatever the context or form, the aim is to detect patterns, continuities and discontinuities in regard to observing how 'textile stuff' can be implicated in memory and experience.

The relationship between tradition and innovation has been significant in theoretical discourse on textiles. Incorporating that which is not necessarily part of established critical discourse has influenced the approach adopted in the theoretical sections above. The dimension of the 'Miniature' and the 'Gigantic' builds on these ideas, specifically on Heidegger's notion of 'thingness' with regards to 'textile stuff', and the literary possibilities of Phillips, with regards to language itself as an expressive medium. It is also an opportunity to weave unorthodox thinking about textiles into critical discourse in an act of cultural creativity.

The dimension of the 'Miniature' and the 'Gigantic', is a means of impressing upon the reader a private and public dynamic through an exaggerated use of scale. In formulating of this concept, I am indebted to Susan Stewart's (1993, pp. 37-93) 'micrographia' and 'exaggeration' as modes of signification of experience.<sup>14</sup> In addition Phillips' (2010, p. 13) methodological possibilities of 'improvisation and imagination' are added into the formulation. Thus, it is important to settle on terms which, in the footsteps of Phillips (2010), have an implied 'public' and 'private' about them. First, the 'private' conjures up a feeling of 'behind the scenes', 'aloneness' (though not necessarily loneliness), the 'separate' and

---

<sup>14</sup> STEWART, S. 1993. *On Longing: Narratives of the 'Miniature', the 'Gigantic', the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. The first part of Stewart's book examines narratives that are generated by objects; the second part examines the ways in which the souvenir and the collection are objects which are generated by means of narratives. Stewart (p. 65 -66) examines ways in which the "souvenir" and the "collection" are objects which can mediate experience in time and space. She articulates the 'Miniature's' ability to "skew time and space relations of the everyday world and finds its use value transformed into the infinite time of reverie". The 'Miniature' has the capacity to create an "other" time, one which prohibits change and the instability of lived reality. Thus, adopting the 'Miniature' scale provides an effective platform to communicate moral ideas of life/death within a diminutive, ordered world away from external chaos.

'unofficial' world of the individual. The 'public' conjures up the 'social', 'mutual', 'municipal', 'communal' and 'accessible' world of the public realm.

The terms 'Miniature' and 'Gigantic' abstractly define a representation of private and public. The use of metaphor which offers a dramatic contrast in scale hints at an underlying psychological reality. The 'Miniature' is oriented towards the private life of the individual. The 'Gigantic' on the other hand is oriented toward public life and social interaction.

Importantly, each can be experienced on a thread of narrative coming from the other. In essence this reflects the fluidity of textiles as diverse mobile signs which participate in everyday life in both private and public spheres. The 'Miniature' and the 'Gigantic' dimension provides an imaginary space which links viewing with contemplation and speculation. In effect it is an illusory device to spy on the textile in its 'Miniature' and 'Gigantic' circumstances, whereby the textile becomes a 'theoretical curiosity' for much closer inspection. As such, the 'Miniature' and the 'Gigantic' abstractly become metaphors of containment; small and large, unofficial and authorised, separate and social. It is in the light of these observations that we can begin to ask questions as to where textiles fit in the complex jigsaw of memory.

So how do all the pieces of the jigsaw fit together? How do the 'Miniature' and the 'Gigantic', the individual and cultural concerns of memory, the 'textile stuff', particular techniques, skills, traditions and innovations within the framework of the textile arts, as well as knowledge of the social and cultural histories of cloth, interact with each other in issues relating to the preservation and representation of memory? To address these questions is to see cloth as what Stallybrass (1996) has termed 'a form of memory' itself, in that the strains, stresses, stains and smells we impress upon it, makes cloth into an archive of our most intimate life.

## **B. Application**

### **B1. Derrida's 'Archivisation'**

Following on from Stallybrass, Derrida's concept of 'archivisation' provides a way of thinking about how memory can be preserved in textiles. I have noted that Derrida's deconstruction and poststructuralist theory have been a part of increasing intellectual and critical discourse on textiles. By building on the existing work of scholars in the field of cloth and memory, I propose that Derrida's concept of 'archivisation' forms part of this critique, not as a replacement for current discourse, but as a supplement to it. Derrida (1998, p. 27) claims that the structure of any archive determines what can be archived. Thus, history and memory are formed by the technical methods which are the basis of the archive's construction.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> DERRIDA, J. 1998. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. As Derrida (in his own words) (pp.18-26) is "tinkling" away at his portable Macintosh computer, he asks himself, "what is the moment

However, Derrida does not specifically require the archive to be housed in a building, with racks of shelving filled with cardboard boxes, folders and box files. For Derrida, 'archivisation' is consigning, inscribing a trace in some external location, a space outside.

Ketelaar (2005) highlights an important point in regard to two distinct approaches (printing and psychic inscription) to the subject of 'archivisation' elaborated by Derrida in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. In discussing Derrida's 'archivisation', I refer to the printing element of his concept, which requires an exterior substrate. Importantly, this is distinct from the psychic inscription which Derrida also elaborates on in *Archive Fever*.<sup>16</sup> Derrida's text is very rich, and it is important to stress that the role of inscription is only a small part of Derrida's much larger examination of the archive notion in the works of Freud. However, this structure (he uses the term 'substrate') – the archive's capacity to record and store information – is at the heart of Derrida's examination of exterior inscription in his concept of 'archivisation'. For Derrida, 'archivisation' can only happen through the methods that are available to make preservation possible. But success is also dependent upon what Derrida (1998) describes as a receptive substrate, something which is able to receive and hold information. The idea which is of interest to me here is that memory can in some way be saved, preserved or inscribed in something. That 'something', in the context of this study, is cloth.

To explore this idea, I consider cloth from two perspectives. First, following Stallybrass (1996), there is the concept of cloth in its everyday use as naturally recording and preserving human imprints, to become a form of memory itself. Second, there is the idea of what Tanner (2004, pp. 184) describes as 'inscribing practices' in memory. Inscribing practices requires something to be done to hold and trap information. The receptive surface of cloth makes it susceptible to deliberate inscription. I examine the

---

*proper* to archive, if there such a thing, the instant of archivisation strictly speaking" (p.25). Faced with making a decision, Derrida (p. 26).pushes down a certain key in order "to save a text undamaged, in a hard and lasting way, to protect marks from being erased". At that moment of pressing down a key Derrida realises that he is saving the history of a concept. Thus for Derrida (p. 18) "archivable" meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives". This claims Derrida (p.18) "begins with the printer".

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.19. The opening note of *Archive Fever* examines the word "archive" from *arkhē*, wherein Derrida (p.1) identifies dual principles in the primitiveness, or *primariness*, of the archive and in its centrality to the actualisation of the law. According to Derrida "superior magistrates", described as *archons* were able to exercise power and control, they also had the right to make or to represent the law (p.2). From here Derrida deconstructs an act central to the archive, that of inscription, as it is treated by Freud. He first elaborates on *printing* which relies on an exterior substrate. Later on Derrida implicates the act of printing in Freud's conception of the "psychic archive distinct from spontaneous memory" (p. 19) which requires an internal substrate.

properties of cloth in the re-presentation of memory through artificial, rather than natural imprint.

The following examples demonstrate the capacity of cloth to 'hold' information, to enable the memory of the dispossessed and deceased to exist within the present through contemporary re-contextualisation. I explore these themes within the field of representation set out in the 'Gigantic' I contextualize critical discussion of an art work within the study of textiles as an expanded field which is part of the broader contexts of visual and material culture. I interpret the generic 'textiles stuff' as part of creative practices that are traditionally associated with textiles. It is in this context that I will be exploring one aspect of Derrida's 'archivisation'.

## **B2. Themes of the 'Gigantic'**

*21 Grams* (Fig. 2) is an installation of suspended men's white shirt collars. The work was inspired by the high number of male suicides in Ireland (particularly among young men). The work demonstrates the potential of cloth to naturally preserve evidence of human interaction that becomes a potent device in the representation of social and cultural memory.

*Fig. 2, Seamus McGuinness, 21 Grams, 2006*

Installation: stiffened white cloth, paint, stitch and wire (courtesy of the artist)

The motif of worn clothing is a poetic one, especially in relation to memory, and the uncanny after-image of an absent wearer]. In *Adorned in Dreams*, Wilson (1985. pp.1-2) begins amongst the uncanny, disembodied gowns in a costume museum. And Ash (1996; 1999) has written about the representation of 'clothes without people' in art, both as floating commodities, and as memories of absence. Tseëlon evokes Freud's notion of transient beauty, when she refers to Judith Clark's Juxtaposition, in the exhibition 'The concise dictionary of dress', of vintage iconic dresses with their wax imprints. Functioning as the dresses' negatives, they allude to wax moulds, that while appearing durable are destroyed in the process of casting the objects they encase (Clark & Phillips, 2010, p. 40-1).

Stallybrass (1993), writing after the death of his friend Allon White, has eloquently considered the way in which clothing receives smells, sweat and the shape of its wearer. Stallybrass (1999) does not view clothes primarily as objects of technological or artistic production but considers first of all their use, how they are worn and how they relate to the human body they encase. For him (ibid, p. 29), clothing can also become a residue, a ruin of sorts, and a site for mourning. It does so not just by being there but by being worn again and making recollection possible. Similarly Ash (1996), has pondered the visual and emotional affectivity of clothes as memory objects; arguing that clothes, their smell and texture, remind the spectator of the past presence of the person to whom they belonged, their inhabiting them, a moment when they wore them. Ash asserts that 'the associative

memory of an absent person, stimulated through the viewing or sensing of an item of clothing, requires us to be imaginative about the past, about the object or person when they did exist, and that process is positive, not sentimental, although the contemplation is of and for absence - possibly even death' (Ash, 1996, pp. 20 - 22).<sup>17</sup> These ideas are resonant with those of Tanner (2004, p. 184) who describes such objects as functioning both as signs and as 'material markers of grief'. Such objects, Tanner (2006) argues, hold on to the body's past presence as subject and object, resisting its metaphorisation yet still articulating embodied loss.

Bond (1999) has stated that semiotic analysis has provided a means for excavating the text embedded within the image. Semiotics has also been applied in fashion and textile theory to deconstruct the signs and symbols inherent within cloth. In particular the work of Barthes (1990) has been influential in this field. However, because of semiotics' literary origins, Bond (1999) argues that it has little to say about the sensory effect of materials that engage bodily memory. Stallybrass (1999) has considered these limitations too. Frustrated and unable to locate his deceased friend, instead he locates his loss through the sensory reclamation of his friend's jacket. Stallybrass (1999, p. 39 - 42) writes, 'I cannot recall Allon White as an idea, but only as the habits through which I inhabit him, through which he inhabits and wears me. I know Allon through the smell of his jacket.' Tanner (2006, p. 191) has argued that the immediate presence of clothing is outside linguistic representation: 'it is inside the realm of sensory reclamation which speaks to an embodied experience'. Allon White's jacket exists in this realm which locates memory in texture and smell.

However, unlike Allon White's jacket, McGuinness' shirts are not wearable. They remain objects, 'textile stuff' within the space of the 'Gigantic', because they neither relate to a known individual or friend, nor can we touch or smell them, and therefore they must be interpreted intellectually.

Initially it is the shirts themselves which create understanding, individually and in combination; the male garment as cultural signifier, exposing and parodying inherited values and stereotypes. It is the sense of clothing which is conveyed to the spectator by a predominantly male garment, the intimation of the male form and the simultaneous existence of presence and absence. To follow Ash (1996), it is the intimation of the person that was and is now without their clothes.

McGuinness has all the skills and knowledge with which to make his own shirts but has chosen to work with materials of impoverished means, things

---

<sup>17</sup> ASH, J. 1996. Memory and Objects. In: P. KIRKHAM, ed. *The Gendered Object*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 219 - 224. Ash's essay offers a positive view of absence. She explores clothing and its relation to memory through examination of clothes which remain after a person has died.

worn and discarded. As Derrida has argued, on a receptive surface there will always be permanent 'traces' of those things having been inscribed upon it, intentionally or otherwise. Stallybrass (1999) and Millar (2012) have remarked on the capacity of cloth to receive the human imprint. Second-hand clothes may well be imbued with the smells, sweat, or shape of their previous owners. As Stallybrass (1999, p. 29) puts it, bodies come and go but the clothes circulate through second hand shops and rummage sales. Stripped of their original function, McGuinness' shirts retain a value that stems from the fact that they have been touched and worn by someone else. Beyond the lack of surface texture, imagery or words, the unknown owner of the shirt is surely present in the inscriptions left upon the cloth; signs of wear and tear. The unwanted and discarded become metaphors for feelings of uselessness, of being cast aside and no longer useful. It is impossible not to associate the shirts as a metaphor for grief.

*Fig. 3, Seamus McGuinness, 21 Grams (detail), 2006*  
Photograph courtesy of the artist

Each shirt is the same, but different, each emphasising an individual life. Their unfinished state speaks of a life cut short. In their ragged palpability, the shirts are a reminder of our own vulnerability, of the frailty of the human condition; and a reminder of what human beings are capable of. Just like the human body, cloth can be cut, damaged and repaired. The tattered shirts ask us to consider the body as a delicate vessel which is susceptible to hurt and harm. In doing so, questions are raised around our own mortality. The torn cloth initiates a desire to be amid the field of representation of the 'Miniature', a desire to be nurtured, and also perhaps to lovingly mend and repair that which is in tatters. In addition in this installation there is also the motif of hanging (of the collars) which is poignant in relation to suicide.

Within the realm of the 'Gigantic', these 'material remains' are not emblematic of a grand past; rather they are evidence of how 'textile stuff' from everyday life can serve as powerful indicators symbolically evoking a vanished community and the tragedy which caused it.

In Caroline Bartlett's *Storeys of Memory 1* (Fig. 4), the artist has worked with the absorbent surface and the fragility of cloth to deliberately stain, mark, and to inscribe a form of artificially constructed memory into cloth.

*Fig. 4, Caroline Bartlett, Storeys of Memory 1, 2002*  
Discharge, stitch resist on linen, pleated and stitched, 33 x 101.5 x 3cm  
Photograph courtesy of the artist

Bartlett's *Storeys of Memory 1* is a response to the space of the Weiner Library Archive. Formed in 1933 the Weiner Library is one of the world's most extensive archives on the Holocaust. The artist formulates her



questions around the way archives function, for example restricted access and the implications of limits imposed upon the Archive by the institution itself (Bartlett, 2009, p. 12). As Brown and Brown (1999, p.17) have commented, many different meanings and memories are embedded in the documents and artefacts housed within the Archive, but their significance can be obscured rather than revealed by the systems which control them. The central theme is the intrinsic relationship between remembering and forgetting in relation to the Holocaust. However, *Storeys of Memory 1* does not cite the form of a traditional archive in any obvious way: systems of storage, classification, request slips, for example. The artwork's worn, patchy appearance suggests the very opposite of conservation and preservation; absence, erasure and destruction.

*Storeys of Memory 1* is constructed to look like an opened book, except that, unlike Bourgeois' fabric book, *Ode à l'Oubli*, there are no pages to be turned.<sup>18</sup> The fabric has been printed and then treated with processes by which the black ground is bleached out or 'discharged'. Text is implied but it is patchy and incomplete; surfaces are partially erased, and some are reworked. Bartlett's lack of explicit text and image is deliberate. The Weiner Archive contains vast sources of visual and written material, yet the absence of these does not alleviate the atrocities and suffering which underlie the work. The gaps and erasures caused by the bleaching agents, and the deliberate sutures, have a much deeper significance than merely surface interest in that they imply absence, damage and extermination. Furthermore, the gaps and erasures draw attention to spaces on the shelves of the archive, the missing links in the row upon row of tightly packed boxes and files. Such gaps are what historian Carolyn Steedman (2001, p. 70), when referring to Michelet, called 'the historians' task': to give a voice to those who for the most part no longer exist.

The central spine of Bartlett's book-like structure appears as if it has been folded backwards and forwards until it resembles a book which has had its spine broken. Bartlett has severed the threads which would normally hold the paper 'pleats' - the pages of the book - together. The impression is of a poorly treated book. The cut threads indicate a release of tension, the unlocking of the past. Whatever it is which lay hidden in the folds of the pleats are released from their restraints; but not all secrets and silences are allowed a chance of resurrection. Constraining lines are stitched back in with a strong linen bookbinding thread, knotted and bound until they are secured firmly to the cloth; there is now no possibility of escape. Bartlett's random knotting and 'holding' technique is an acknowledgement of the

---

<sup>18</sup> Bourgeois' fabric book *Ode à l'Oubli*, is an encyclopaedia of colour, form and texture. However, its real beauty lies in how poetically it conjures up an especially personal and intimate contemplation of the household from which it came. Bourgeois wrote "I have always had a fear of being separated and abandoned. The sewing is my attempt to keep things together and make things whole."

work of dedicated volunteers whose weekly conservational task is to carefully remove staples from important papers and painstakingly stitch them back together in an effort to preserve them. Such texts bear witness to grim atrocities of the past and serve as a defence against the scandal of forgetting. The technique is also symbolic of the chance of discovery. If lucky enough to be of interest for investigation and reinterpretation, there is always the chance of being written back into being; rediscovered and remembered rather than forgotten. Perhaps also her constraining knots and bindings are symbolic of the capture and suppression of the many victims of the Holocaust.

Bartlett's work demonstrates a skilled understanding of working with textiles as a communicative medium as well as expertise in textile techniques. Working with the absorbency of cloth to accommodate her deliberate marks, sutures and stains, texture, pattern and colour create a visual narrative. Each visual signifier can be interpreted as part of a tale of sadness and loss, a reminder of a lost community. The triumph of Bartlett's wordless representation has been to inscribe and preserve the memory of a lost community whilst at the same time question the traditional role of the Archive in the conservation of memory.

Applying Derrida's concept of 'archivisation' to these artworks within the realm of the 'Gigantic', we are able to perceive the preservation and representation of cultural and social memory in and through textiles. Whether naturally or artificially marked and stained the absorbent properties of textiles, as both material and stuff, have given voice and identity to the silent, the unheard and the lost.

### **B3. Themes of the 'Miniature'**

In this section, the emphasis shifts away from creative practice to focus instead on how 'textile stuff' can furnish individual memory. In Part A, Section 2, I proposed that, underpinned by traditional discourses of memory, the literary fugues of Woolf, Proust and Benjamin could offer insight into attempts to embody the experience which relates directly to the object of study. In turn, these might influence critical discourses surrounding textiles and memory. Reference to several short literary vignettes below shows how the 'Miniature' - the home, rooms, soft furnishings, clothes, cupboards and drawers, and books - enables a direct access to the 'flash' and 'jolt' of memory as it is experienced in the moment of recollection. Within these private scenes it is the 'textile stuff' which enables the drama of recollection.

In *A Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1994, p.8) wrote:

Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more

clearly delineated. All our lives we come back to them in our daydreams. A psychoanalyst should, therefore, turn his attention to this simple localisation of our memories.<sup>19</sup>

Following Bachelard, I examine 'the house, the bedroom in which we were alone' (Bachelard, 1994, p. 14), the home as an 'archive', a library of private evidence in which to search for textured traces and human imprints preserved upon the 'textile stuff' within, those which are able to tell us about the trials and tribulations of life itself and stories about the occupants.

Writing about an unpleasant childhood memory, Walter Benjamin presents us with the first example. Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (2006) provides insight into a variety of private, semi-private, and public spaces. The structure of *Berlin Childhood* is laid out in a series of vignettes, with detailed descriptions of bourgeois interiors, of furniture, rooms, and objects, as (uncannily) experienced by a child. These descriptions join renderings of a child's encounters with public places, buildings and parks, as Benjamin inhabits and narrates the real and imaginary world of an urban childhood. Benjamin's own childhood is represented in a series of enigmatic and intimate 'Miniature' worlds. It is in one of these 'Miniatures': *A Ghost*, that the stage is set.

All day long a young Benjamin had kept his dream from the previous night a secret. In the dream, a ghost had appeared to Benjamin, but he found it difficult to describe the place where the 'spectre' went about its business (Benjamin: 2006, p.101).

It occurred to Benjamin that this place was as familiar, although just as inaccessible, as a corner of his parents' bedroom. Benjamin's description of his parents' bedroom is fuelled by an incredible abundance of textile details and references which are emphasised in the text. After he had identified the place of his haunting experience, Benjamin (2006, pp.101-102), went on to describe the interior of his parent's bedroom:

This was a corner of my parents' bedroom that was covered by a faded purple velvet curtain, behind which hung my mother's dressing gowns. The darkness on the other side of the curtain was impenetrable: this corner formed the infernal pendant to the paradise that opened with my mother's linen closet. The shelves of that wardrobe – whose edges were adorned with a verse from Schiller's "The Bell", embroidered in blue on a white border – held the neatly stacked linen for bed and table,

---

<sup>19</sup> BACHELARD, G. Op Cit, pp. 3-37. For Bachelard the house is a privileged entity for phenomenological study of inside space. In *The Poetics of Space* Bachelard takes the reader on journey from cellar to attic, to the innermost corners of the house to show how our perceptions of houses and other shelters shape our thoughts, memories and dreams.

all the sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths and napkins. A scent of lavender came from the plump silk sachets that dangled over the pleated lining on the inside of the two closet doors. In this way the old mysterious magic of knitting and weaving, which once had inhabited the spinning wheel, was divided into heaven and hell. Now the dream came from a latter kingdom: a ghost that busied itself at a wooden framework from which silk fabrics were hanging. These silken things the ghost stole.

Benjamin's description opens the door to a closet drama which is a fantasy of sensory pleasure, one where evocations of touch, smell and sight are all possible. Sumptuous velvets nestle amongst sensuous satins and silks, with the scent of lavender emanating from silk pouches. We are reassured by the ordinariness and the orderliness of it all, by the comforting reference to his mother's dressing gown, the carefully folded and neatly stacked sheets, pillowcases and napkins. However, Benjamin's closet is not necessarily the safe place it should be; the homely is at the same time 'unheimlich'. And the threat comes from within the supposed zone of safety, the protective environment of his parents' bedroom. From the paradise that was Benjamin's mother's closet, a ghost has busied itself at a wooden framework, from which beautiful silk fabrics were hanging. Benjamin's textured drama re-enacts that which he wished to keep secret; these silken fabrics the ghost stole. The following day Benjamin awoke to find that the house had been burgled. Benjamin connects the burglary to the behaviour of the ghost in his dream (Benjamin, 2006, pp.101-102). However, it is his mother's closet which is of interest, in that its interior textured spaces connect textiles to memory and recollection within the realm of the 'Miniature'.

In Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*, a young Proust writing of his childhood memories at the house in Combray relates the fabric of his mother's dress to his own feelings of melancholy and longing. Proust describes the sadness that the sound of his mother's dress made him feel as it announced the moment that would follow; his mother would leave his bedside after kissing him goodnight and return to the awaiting guests downstairs. Proust (2003, p. 16) mournfully wrote:

My sole consolation when I went upstairs for the night was that Mama would come and kiss me once I was in bed. But this goodnight lasted so short a time, she went back down so soon, that the moment when I heard her coming up, then passing along the hallway with its double doors, the soft sound of her garden dress of blue muslin, hung with little cords of plaited straw, was for me a painful moment. It announced the moment that would follow it, in which she had left me, in which she had gone back down.

From the pages of Proust's novel emanate the curious sound of textiles. The soft sound of his mother's blue muslin garden dress shows how it is

possible to express textiles' sound-affecting qualities and their associations in representations of memory. In a similar vein, a grieving Barthes (2000, p. 65), in his search for a photograph of his mother which captured her essence, comments on the capacity for a memory of 'textile stuff' to capture a moment in history, both as an emotion and a factual record:

Here around 1913, is my mother dressed up – hat with a feather, gloves, delicate linen at wrists and throat, her 'chic' belied the sweetness and simplicity of her expression. This is the only time I have seen her like this, caught in a History (of tastes, fashions, fabrics).

This is the thing with textiles: well-used fabric has a capacity - if not unique then unusually powerful - to embody both a communal, historical moment and a local individual, specific story: this is what a late 19<sup>th</sup> century sofa looked like; this is what my mother wore in the 1930s. *Figures 5 and 6* show the contents of my own Grandmother's dressing table drawers. After my Grandmother's death, I returned to her house to help sort out her belongings and to document the existing space before anything was moved. The contents of the dressing table drawer were a painful reminder of her absence: the 'Sunday-Best' gloves, the scarves which were thought too 'good' for everyday wear, wrapped in translucent paper packets. The *Tweed* talcum powder, the smell of which I had always loved, and the wood-effect box inside which she kept her jewellery, every item in those drawers was associated with her memory (Stewart, 1993, p. xii), in the form of a mini-shrine whose contents were evidence of a life which had preceded my own.

*Figs. 5 and 6, Carole Hunt, Contents of my Grandma's Dressing Table, 2009*

Bachelard (1994, p. 79) comments that Bergson did not interpret the faculty of memory as a wardrobe of recollections.<sup>20</sup> However, the wardrobe image is one of intimacy and is potent in that it captures memory as being fixed firmly on textiles within intimate spaces. The closet of Benjamin's mother is a 'Miniature' within a 'Miniature'. It is like a cupboard within a house or a box within a drawer, a smaller store of intimacy, which is psychologically complex and which is not open to just anybody. It is private.<sup>21</sup> It may not occur to most people that wardrobe or dressing

---

<sup>20</sup> BACHELARD, G. *Op Cit*, p.74-89. Bachelard contends that Henri Bergson disliked compartmentalised arguments. He argues that although there is an abundance of metaphor in Bergson's writings, images are rare. Bachelard (p. 75) goes on to examine what he describes as the "drawer metaphor" to describe the polemical nature of Bergson's philosophy and classified thinking.

<sup>21</sup> MADANIPOUR, A. 2003. *Public and Private Spaces of the City*. London: Routledge. Madanipour (p. 62) argues that the realm of the household is the institutionalised arena of privacy. As such, the perception of the home as protected

tables are places for secret and intimate encounters with the past, but for the investigator of material memories it seems perfectly natural that such unassuming entities possess great promise. Viewed within the realm of the 'Miniature', the home is an accidental archive. And, fortunately for this study, it is also a place of undervalued and displaced items, a myriad of 'textile stuff': cushions, throws, jumpers, dresses, socks, tea towels, blankets, soft toys - what Ricoeur describes as 'mnemonic phenomena, all upon which memory may be fixed' (2006, p. 21).

The memory narratives of Woolf, Benjamin, Proust and Barthes provide rich examples of how textiles can contribute to recollection. They reveal how 'textile stuff' has powerful emotional impact with regard to personal experience. These literary 'Miniatures' open up worlds of diminutive theatrical possibilities of private 'places', where the discovery of 'textile stuff' illuminates, as an active albeit silent witness, to the everyday life of individuals and their secret passions.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, these examples highlight the suggestive power of textiles to communicate memory and meaning through properties other than the purely visual: evocations of sound, touch, smell and warmth – all of which are evident in these writings.

Finally, it is fitting to return to Woolf to show how textiles can become a vivid element in communicating intensely lived experience. Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* presents a moving account of loss during an interval of ten years. After an eventful and emotional ten years, the remaining members of the Ramsay family return to their summer home, to find the house empty and the doors locked.<sup>23</sup> Woolf's description is of a place which groaned with unsettled spirits, one where clothes kept their human shape,

---

space is deeply rooted in Western culture; removed from the life of the street, it is a refuge for people and things.

<sup>22</sup> BACHELARD, G. *Op Cit*, p.80-89. Commenting on the holders of secrets and hiding places, Bachelard (p. 88) comments that "all intimacy hides from view".

<sup>23</sup> WOOLF, V. 1992. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Penguin. Woolf's novel is divided into three parts: *The Window*, *Time Passes*, and *The Lighthouse*. Despite the inherent complexities of Woolf's many themes and stream-of-consciousness narrative, the plot of the novel is simple. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, their children, and numerous house guests - including Lily Briscoe, the central figure of *The Lighthouse* section - are on holiday in the remote Hebridean islands. An expedition to a nearby lighthouse is put off by Mr. Ramsay, and ten years later, after the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay and two of the Ramsays' children, the trip is successfully carried out by Mr. Ramsay and his children James and Cam. *The Window* is the longest section of the book, but it takes place in a single day and focuses primarily on the character Mrs. Ramsay, a beautiful, placid, upper-middle-class Victorian wife and mother who devotes herself to family and friends. The years between the planned trip to the lighthouse and the actual event are poetically recounted in the short section *Time Passes*, in which the effects of time are illustrated in a description of the slow decay of the Ramsays' empty holiday home, combined with flashes of imagery of World War I, the physical aging of the characters, and death. *To the Lighthouse* is meditation on marriage, parenthood and childhood, on grief, sadness, despair and bitterness.

'hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished and cracked'. Woolf (1927/1992, p. 142) continues:

What people had shed and left - a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes – those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated; how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons; how once the looking glass had held a face.

Woolf's narrative sums up how dramas, acted out within the space of the 'Miniature', are made up of tangible presences and intangible absences, where textile forms function as eerie and evocative indicators of what is living, what is gone and even dead. As Barthes has commented, 'clothing is perishable, but it makes a second grave for the loved being' (Barthes, 2000, p. 64).

Krauss (1985, p. 292) uses the term 'paraliterary space'; that which is created from blurring the distinction between literature and criticism, which she argues is unhelpful for systematic analysis. Challenging the influential textual analysis of Barthes and Derrida on art, Krauss (1986) argues that this practice runs counter to the critic's job of unpacking the meaning of a work of art.<sup>24</sup> However, textile art as material or 'stuff' is not the only source of insight into how memory can be communicated through textiles. 'I propose that supplementing traditional academic analysis with literary writings and personal memoirs may assist in the formulation of a richer analysis that includes our 'real' experiences of textiles in various forms.

### **Conclusion: Material Remains**

This article has considered ways of analysing how textile art practice and literary works express private and public memory in and through textiles. There are three principal conclusions.

First, traditional analysis and discourse around the relationship between textiles and memory does not fully capture our material experience of textiles. An approach that combines a rigorous critical analysis with personal experiences described in literary memoirs offers a method of capturing and describing memory as it relates to textiles, one that is closer to that which is genuinely experienced.

---

<sup>24</sup> KRAUSS, R. Op Cit, pp. 291-295. Citing Barthes intention to blur the distinction between literature and criticism, Krauss argues that Barthes work cannot be called criticism but equally cannot be called not-criticism. Whilst recognising the difference between Barthes and Derrida's projects, Krauss (p. 292) argues that what is created, as in the case of much of Derrida, is a kind of "paraliterature". The paraliterary space, Krauss (p. 292) states, is the space of "debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation; but it is not the space of unity, coherence or resolution that we think of as constituting the work of literature".

The second conclusion concerns the innovative use of language, and how that could be effective in the formulation of a more precisely nuanced discourse directed at particular aspects of textiles, textile practice, memory and the nexus of the public and the private. Drawing on the work of Stewart (1993), Pajackowska (2005) and Phillips (2010) I have shown that the terms 'textile stuff', the 'Miniature' and the 'Gigantic', can act as shorthand to facilitate understanding of emerging conceptual frameworks.

The last point relates to the nature of cloth, and why it may be considered a special case in the field of memory studies. The writings of Stallybrass (1993) emphasize an important aspect of these studies which has been to consider cloth as a type of memory 'archive' in itself. Building on the work of Stallybrass, I found Derrida's concept of 'archivisation' as a form of recording memory through 'exterior' inscription (or mark-making), as useful for thinking about how memory can be on and within cloth. In the literal sense, 'archivisation' may be situated as a theory within a creative practice. In this way, by utilising the often fragile and absorbent properties of cloth, 'archivisation' can be understood as a method used by artists to inscribe a form of memory. At the same time, 'archivisation' can also be understood as relating to memory which has been naturally imprinted upon cloth in its use as an everyday functional object.

### References

Ash, Juliet (1996), 'Memory and Objects', in P. Kirkham (ed), *The Gendered Object*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 219 - 224.

Assmann, A. (2006), 'Fury of Disappearance: Christian Boltanski's Archives of Forgetting', in R. Beil (ed.) *Boltanski: Time*, Germany: Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz: Institut Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, pp. 89 – 97.

Attfield, Judy (2000), *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*, Oxford and New York: Berg.

Bachelard, Gaston (1994), *The Poetics of Space*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Bal, Mieke (1999), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Hanover: University Press of New England.

Barthes, Roland (1990), *The Fashion System*, New York: Hill and Wang.

Barthes, Roland (2000), *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, London: Vintage.

Benjamin, Walter (1978), *Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, New York: Schocken Books.



**Benjamin, Walter (1999), *Illuminations*, London: Pimlico.**

Benjamin, Walter (2006), *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, London: Harvard University Press.

Bergson, Henri (1991), *Matter and Memory*, New York: Zone Books.

Bond, Anthony (1999), *TRACE: A Historical Contextualisation of the Theme* [online]: Liverpool: Biennial of International Contemporary Art. [accessed 20 July 2012 and 24 November 2012]. Available from:

<http://archive.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/sub/staff/anthonybond/lectures/1999/trace/index.html/>

Bourgeois, Louise (2006), *Aller Retour*, Nuremberg: Moderne Kunst, pp. 86-120

Boym, Svetlana (2001), *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books.

**Brown, H. and B. BROWN. (1998), 'The Making of Memory: The Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of National Consciousness', *History of the Human Sciences*, 11:4, pp. 17-32.**

Derrida, Jacques (1998), *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

**Derrida, Jacques (2008) [1978], *Writing and Difference*, Oxon: Routledge.**

Chandler, Daniel (2002), *Semiotics: The Basics*, London and New York: Routledge.

**Greer, Germaine (2010), 'I've braved earthquakes and bullets in my hunt for fabulous fabrics', <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/mar/14/germaine-greer-textiles-quilts> (accessed 14 March 2010).**

Halbwachs, Maurice (1992), *On Collective Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Harris, Jennifer (1999), *Art Textiles of the World: Great Britain Volume 2*, Winchester: Telos Art Publishing.**

Heidegger, Martin (2001), *Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York: Perennial Classics.

Howes, David (2003), *Sensual Relations, Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*, Michigan: University of Michigan.

Huyssen, Andreas (1995), *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, London: Routledge.

Huyssen, Andreas (2003), *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Jeffries, Janis (2007), 'Laboured Cloth: Translations of Hybridity in Contemporary Art', in J. Livingstone and J. Ploof (eds.), *The Object of Labour: Art, Cloth and Cultural Production*, Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 283 – 298.

Ketelaar, Eric (2000), 'Archivistics Research: Saving the Profession', *The American Archivist*, 63: 3, pp. 322 - 340.

Krauss, Rosalind (1986), *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, London and Cambridge, MA: MIT.

Kristeva, Julia (1984), *Revolution in Poetic Language*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Madanipour, Ali (2003), *Public and Private Spaces of the City*, London: Routledge.

Maharaj, Sarat (1992), 'Textile Art – Who Are You? Towards Intercultural Studies in Textiles', *Journal of Design History*, 26:4, p.79.

Maharaj, Sarat (2001), 'Textile Art – Who Are You?', in J. Jeffries, ed. *Reinventing Textiles, Vol.2 Gender and Identity*. Bristol: Telos, pp. 7-10

Millar, Lesley (2012), *Cloth and Memory*, Salts Mill (exhibition catalogue).

Pajaczkowska, C. (2005), 'On Stuff and Nonsense: The Complexity of Cloth', *Textile: The Journal of Cloth & Culture*, 3: 3, pp. 220-249.

Phillips, Adam and Clark, Judith (2010), *The Concise Dictionary of Dress*, London: Violette Editions.

Polllock, Griselda (2006) [1988], *Vision and Difference*, London: Routledge.

Proust, Marcel (1966), *Remembrance of Things Past*, 17th edition, London: Chatto and Windus.

Proust, Marcel, (2003) [1913], *The Way By Swann's*. London: Penguin.

Ricoeur, Paul (2004), *Memory, History, Forgetting*, London: Chicago.

Saltzman, Lisa (2006), *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Samuel, Raphael (1996), *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1, Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, London and New York: Verso.

Stallybrass, Peter (1993), 'Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things', *The Yale Review*, 81:2, pp. 35 – 50.

**Stallybrass, Peter (1996), 'Worn Worlds: Clothes and Identity on the Renaissance Stage', in D. Grazia, M. Quilligan and P. Stallybrass (eds.), *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 289-231.**

**Stallybrass, Peter (1999), 'Worn Worlds: Clothes Mourning and the Life of Things', in B. D. Amos and L. Weissberg (eds.) *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, pp. 27 – 45.**

**Steedman, Carolyn (2001), *Dust*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.**

**Stewart, Susan (1993), *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.**

**Tanner, Laura (2006), *Lost Bodies: Inhabiting the Borders of Life and Death*, New York: Cornell.**

**Weissberg, Liliane (1999), 'Framing the Collective', in B. D. Amos and L. Weissberg (eds.), *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, pp.12-15.**

**Wilson, Elizabeth (2007 [1985]), *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London: I.B. Tauris and Co.**

**Winter, Jay (1998), *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge, Cambridge, University Press.**

**Winnicott, W, Donald (2005), *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge.**

**Woolf, Virginia (1992 [1927]), *To the Lighthouse*, London: Penguin.**

**Woolf, Virginia (2000 [1929]), *A Room of One's Own*, London: Penguin.**

**Woolf, Virginia (2002a), *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings*, London: Pimlico.**

**Woolf, Virginia (2002b), 'Sketch of the Past', in J. Schulkind (ed.), *Moments of Being*, London: Pimlico, pp. 78-161.**

**Young, Iris Marion (1994), 'Women Recovering Our Clothes', in S. Bemstock and S. Ferris (eds), *On Fashion*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, pp.197-211.**

